

COMMERCIALLY SEXUALLY EXPLOITED CHILDREN – SEATTLE AND KING COUNTY

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Who are the victims of child prostitution/commercial sexual exploitation? Victims of child prostitution could be of any age, ethnicity, race, religion, socio-economic class, gender and sexual orientation.

Who is especially vulnerable to child prostitution? Children most vulnerable to prostitution are those who are neglected, runaway/thrown-away/homeless, poor, drug-involved, or who have a history of abuse, and are within the foster care and child protective services systems.

Why don't victims seek help? Child prostitution victims often feel that they have no safe place to turn. Most victims are isolated from family and friends, and are in captivity or confinement. They may feel fear, shame, self-blame, or hopelessness. Due to isolation, they may also be dependent upon the pimp/trafficker. Many times, prostituted youth have been groomed by pimps to distrust systems and law enforcement, and they are not aware of existing services. Victims are regularly subjected to threats, physical/sexual/psychological abuse, and live in fear of their pimps/traffickers.

Who are the pimps/traffickers? They are anyone who benefits from the commercial sexual exploitation of a youth/minor (under 18 years old), or facilitates the commercial sexual exploitation of a youth/minor. Pimps/traffickers can be anyone (boyfriend, father, mother, brother, uncle, even a peer), of any gender, age, or ethnicity, and are not always organized criminals.

Who are the buyers? Buyers or “johns” are recipients of the sexual services. They can be of any age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background. They are equally as responsible for the crime, despite their lack of intent or knowledge of age or victim status.

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MYTHS AND FACTS

Myth: Prostituted youth knew what they were getting into.

Fact: Victims of child prostitution are often seduced, coerced, tricked or forced into prostitution. Pimps seek out youths' vulnerabilities and exploit their hope for love, desire for security/protection, and need to obtain basic needs (i.e. food, shelter, and clothing).

Myth: Prostituted youth are criminals.

Fact: Prostituted youth are victims of commercial sexual exploitation or sex trafficking.

Myth: The prostituted youth was paid for his/her services.

Fact: All or most of the money earned by prostituted youth goes directly to the pimp/trafficker. The youth are sometimes provided with just enough money to purchase the food or clothing items that they need, but only with the pimp/trafficker's permission. It is rare that the child victim gets to keep any money.

Myth: Prostituted youth have freedom of movement and can escape if they want to.

Fact: Victims of child prostitution are often subjected to ongoing physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, threats and intimidation. They are kept in physical and emotional bondage and are often not free to leave.

Myth: U.S. citizens cannot be victims of sex trafficking.

Fact: Any child who is forced to perform a commercial sex act for the benefit or gain of a pimp/trafficker is a victim of sex trafficking. Victims can be U.S. citizens or non U.S. citizens.

Myth: Prostituted youth who are trafficked within a state do not qualify for federal victim assistance.

Fact: Prostituted youth are victims of human sex trafficking. All victims of human trafficking qualify under federal law for victim assistance.

Myth: It's not trafficking when the trafficker/pimp and the victim are related.

Fact: Anytime someone profits from the sale of a child for a commercial sex act, that person is a trafficker.

Myth: It's not trafficking unless victims are moved across borders.

Fact: Trafficking refers to the act of benefitting from the commercial sexual exploitation of a child, not the act of moving a child.